

Prevention Pathways

Online Courses

Myths and Facts About Substance Abuse and Violence Against Women

Myth: Most alcoholics are skid row bums.

Fact: Only 3 to 5 percent of alcoholics live under bad conditions. Most are employed and live in mainstream society.^{1,2}

Myth: People who abuse drugs are morally weak and should be able to stop taking drugs if they are willing to change their behavior.

Fact: Addiction is a lasting but treatable disease that people live with for the rest of their lives. Drug abuse begins when an individual makes a conscious choice to use drugs. Drugs interfere with normal brain functioning, creating powerful feelings of pleasure. But they also have long-term effects on brain chemistry and activity. Drug abuse then turns into addiction, which lasts over time and can come back if not treated correctly. People can learn how to live without drugs, but they must remember to *never* use drugs again. Otherwise, they run the risk of becoming addicted again.^{3,4}

Myth: Very few women become alcoholics.

Fact: Decades ago that might have been true. Today, the numbers of men and women affected are roughly equal. Women also tend to abuse prescription drugs in much higher numbers than men do.^{5,6}

Myth: It's only beer.

Fact: A 12-ounce can of beer is about equal to one average cocktail or one glass of wine. You can get very drunk on beer.^{7,8}

Myth: Alcohol is a stimulant.

Fact: Actually, alcohol slows down the central nervous system. Many people believe otherwise because alcohol tends to make them less embarrassed and self-conscious. People then act in ways they might not otherwise. A person's reaction time, judgment, and coordination slow down and become clouded after only a small amount of alcohol.^{9,10}

Myth: Drinking coffee, going for a walk, or taking a cold shower will quickly "sober you up."

Fact: A person can sober up only when the liver gets rid of all the alcohol. Nothing can speed up this process, and eating a meal beforehand will not prevent a person from getting drunk.¹¹

Myth: Substance abuse causes a man to become violent.

Fact: Many men use this excuse after a violent incident. Not all substance abusers are violent. Not all violent people abuse alcohol or drugs. When a man is under the influence of a substance, the chance of his acting out aggressive or violent tendencies is increased. With his inhibitions lowered, the man may act before thinking. While substance abuse and violence often occur together, one does not cause the other. Because substance abuse does not cause violence in the

home or any other violence against women, requiring violent people to attend only substance abuse treatment programs will not effectively end the violence.¹²

Myth: A girl would know if "date rape" drugs (Rohypnol, Gamma-Hydroxybutyrate [GHB], or Ketamine) had been put in her drink.

Fact: Rohypnol, GHB, and Ketamine are called "date rape" drugs because they are colorless, odorless, and tasteless. This means that if a man puts the drug in a woman's drink at a bar or party, she will not know it is in there unless she sees him put the drug in her drink. If a woman leaves to go to the restroom or talk to another friend, the man has plenty of time to slip the drug into her drink.¹³

Myth: Very few women are abused in our country.

Fact: Abuse of a woman occurs about every 15 seconds in the United States. An estimated 3 to 4 million women in America are beaten each year by their husbands or partners.^{14,15}

Myth: Alcoholism and domestic abuse do not have anything in common.

Fact: They do share a few characteristics: (1) Both may be passed from generation to generation, (2) Both involve denying and minimizing the, and (3) Both involve isolation of the family.^{16,17}

Myth: Violence against women by an intimate partner is only a momentary loss of control. It rarely happens more than once.

Fact: According to the American Medical Association, 47 percent of men who beat their wives, girlfriends, or mothers do so at least three times per year.^{18,19}

Myth: Victims of repeated violence must have a mental illness or are crazy.

Fact: This mistaken idea goes back to the belief that anyone would be crazy or "sick" to take the abuse. Most female victims are not mentally ill, although those who are ill are certainly not protected from abuse from their partners or intimates. There are many reasons a woman does not just "leave" a violent situation. Some victims of violence suffer psychological effects, such as posttraumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, or depression.²⁰

Some reasons a woman may not leave a violent situation include:

- Dependence on her partner's money or earnings
- Fear, shame, guilt
- Family pressure to keep the marriage "intact"
- Cultural or religious reasons
- Children,
- Not having any place to go
- Being socially isolated (abuser keeps the woman from interacting with friends and family so that she is emotionally dependent only on him).

Myth: Once a woman is abused, she will never leave the abuser.

Fact: Most women *do* leave the violent conditions, although it may take several attempts to do so. Victims who seek and receive legal assistance at an early stage increase their chances of obtaining the protection they need to leave their abusers. A woman may have many reasons for waiting or for making several tries before leaving for good.²¹ The most dangerous time for a

woman is immediately after she leaves the abusive home. Therefore, it is important for the woman to get help planning to leave safely (see [Safety Planning](#)).

Myth: Violence against women does not happen to older or disabled women.

Fact: Any woman can become a victim of violence.

- A teenager or young woman (ages 12 to 24) may be sexually or physically assaulted or abused by a stranger, acquaintance, romantic partner, or family member.
- A woman (ages 25 to 55) may be assaulted or abused by her husband or ex-husband, boyfriend, partner, acquaintance, or stranger.
- A woman who works outside the home may be assaulted or abused by a coworker.
- An older woman (55+) may be assaulted or abused by her children, husband or ex-husband, caregiver, or a stranger.
- Older and disabled women are often dependent on their family for support, shelter, and daily living requirements (e.g., medicine). Abuse may be physical or it may come in the form of "neglect" by the family member withholding assistance or food. This type of abuse goes largely unreported.²²

Myth: Women ask for rape by how they act or dress.

Fact: Women do not want to be raped. How a woman dresses or acts does not give a man permission to rape her. *No means no.*²³

Myth: All rapists are sexually perverted or psychotic.

Fact: Rape is a violent crime, brought about by the need for power and control, not sex. Men who are misinformed about women or sex or who can only express their feelings of weakness, pain, and rage through sexual assault commit the most rapes.²⁴

Myth: Men and women are the victims of intimate partner violence in equal numbers.

Fact: Women make up nearly 85 percent of victims of all intimate partner violence. Twenty-two percent of all violent acts against women were from an intimate, whereas only 3 percent of violent acts against men were from an intimate.²⁵

Myth: Very little of the violence against women is actually from an intimate partner.

Fact: According to the National Institute of Justice and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 76 percent of the women who were raped and/or physically assaulted since age 18 were assaulted by a current or former husband, a partner with whom they live, or a date, compared with 18 percent of the men.²⁶

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